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THE Orchestral Conductor

THEORY OF HIS ART

BY

HECTOR BERLIOZ.

SEVENTH EDITION

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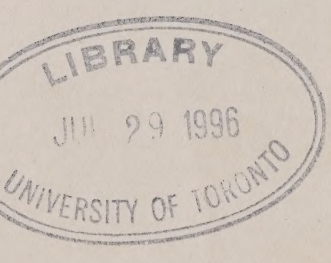
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

from the

ARTHUR PLETTNER

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COLLECTION



THE ORCHESTRAL CONDUCTOR.

THEORY OF HIS ART.

By HECTOR BERLIOZ.

Music appears to be the most exacting of all the Arts, the cultivation of which presents the greatest difficulties, for a consummate interpretation of a musical work so as to permit an appreciation of its real value, a clear view of its physiognomy, or discernment of its real meaning and true character, is only achieved in relatively few cases. Of creative artists, the composer is almost the only one who is dependent upon a multitude of intermediate agents between the public and himself; intermediate agents, either intelligent or stupid, devoted or hostile, active or inert, capable — from first to last — of contributing to the brilliancy of his work, or of disfiguring it, misrepresenting it, and even destroying it completely.

Singers have often been accused of forming the most dangerous of these intermediate agents; but in my opinion, without justice. The most formidable, to my thinking, is the conductor of the orchestra. A bad singer can spoil only his own part; while an incapable or malevolent conductor ruins all. Happy indeed may the composer esteem himself when the conductor into whose hands he has fallen is not at once incapable and inimical; for nothing can resist the pernicious influence of this person. The most admirable orchestra is then paralyzed, the most excellent singers are perplexed and rendered dull; there is no longer any vigor or unity; under such direction the noblest daring of the author appears extravagant, enthusiasm beholds its soaring flight checked, inspiration is violently brought down to earth, the angel's wings are broken, the man of genius passes for a madman or an idiot, the divine statue is precipitated from its pedestal, and dragged in the mud. And what is worse, the public, and even auditors endowed with the highest musical intelligence, are reduced to the impossibility (if a new work is rendered, and they are hearing it for the first time) of recognizing the ravages perpetrated by the orchestral conductor — of discovering the follies, faults, and crimes he commits. If they clearly perceive certain defects of execution, not he, but his victims, are in such cases made responsible. If he has caused the chorus-singers to fail in taking up a point in a finale, if he has allowed a discordant wavering to take place between the choir and the orchestra, or between the extreme sides of the instrumental body, if he has absurdly hurried a movement, or allowed it to linger unduly, if he has interrupted a singer before the end of a phrase, they exclaim: "The singers are detestable! The orchestra has no firmness; the violins have disfigured the principal design; everybody has been wanting in vigor and animation; the tenor was quite out, he did not know his part; the harmony is confused; the author is no accompanist; the voices are ——" etc.

Except in listening to great works already known and esteemed, intelligent hearers can hardly distinguish the true culprit, and allot to him his due share of blame; but the number of these is still so limited that their judgment has little weight; and the hostile conductor — in presence of the public who would pitilessly hiss a *vocal accident* of a good singer — reigns, with all the calm of a bad conscience,

in his baseness and inefficiency. Fortunately, I here attack an exception; for the malevolent orchestral conductor — whether capable or not — is very rare.

The orchestral conductor full of goodwill, but incapable, is on the contrary very common. Without speaking of innumerable mediocrities, directing artists who frequently are much their superiors, an author for example, can scarcely be accused of conspiring against his own works. Yet how many are there who, fancying they are able to conduct, innocently injure their best scores!

Beethoven, it is said, more than once ruined the performance of his symphonies; which he would conduct, even at the time when his deafness had become almost complete. The musicians, in order to keep together, agreed at length to follow the slight indications of time which the concertmeister (first violin-player) gave them; and not to attend to Beethoven's conducting-stick. Moreover, it should be observed, that conducting a symphony, an overture, or any other composition whose movements remain continual, vary little, and contain few nice gradations, is child's play in comparison with conducting an opera, or like work, where there are recitatives, airs, and numerous orchestral designs preceded by pauses of irregular length.

The example of Beethoven, which I have just cited, leads me at once to say that if the direction of an orchestra appears to be very difficult for a blind man, it is indisputably impossible for a deaf one, whatever may have been his technical talent before losing his sense of hearing.

The orchestral conductor should *see* and *hear;* he should be *active* and *vigorous*, should know the *composition* and the *nature* and *compass* of the instruments, should be able to *read* the score, and possess — besides the especial talent of which we shall presently endeavor to explain the constituent qualities — other indefinable gifts, without which an invisible link cannot establish itself between him and those he directs; otherwise the faculty of transmitting to them his feeling is denied him, and power, empire, and guiding influence completely fail him. He is then no longer a conductor, a director, but a simple beater of the time, — supposing he knows how to beat it, and divide it, regularly.

The performers should feel that he feels, comprehends, and is moved: then his emotion communicates itself to those whom he directs, his inward fire warms them, his electric glow animates them, his force of impulse excites them; he throws around him the vital irradiations of musical art. If he is inert and frozen, on the contrary, he paralyzes all about him, like those floating masses of the polar seas, the approach of which is perceived through the sudden cooling of the atmosphere.

His task is a complicated one. He has not only to conduct, in the spirit of the author's intentions, a work with which the performers have already become acquainted, but he must also introduce new compositions and help the performers to master them. He has to criticise the errors and defects of each during the rehearsals, and to organize the resources at his disposal in such a way as to make the best use he can of them with the utmost promptitude; for, in the majority of European cities nowadays, musical artisanship is so ill distributed, performers so ill paid and the necessity of study so little understood, that *economy of time* should be reckoned among the most imperative requisites of the orchestral conductor's art.

Let us now see what constitutes the mechanical part of this art.

The power of *beating the time*, without demanding very high musical attainments, is nevertheless sufficiently difficult to secure; and very few persons really possess it. The signs that the conductor should make — although generally very simple — nevertheless become complicated under certain circumstances, by the division and even the subdivision of the time of the bar.

The conductor is, above all, bound to possess a clear idea of the principal points and character of the work of which he is about to superintend the performance or study ; in order that he may, without hesitation or mistake, at once determine the time of each movement desired by the composer. If he has not had the opportunity of receiving his instructions directly from the composer, or if the *times* have not been transmitted to him by tradition, he must have recourse to the indications of the metronome, and study them well ; the majority of composers, nowadays, taking the precaution to write them at the beginning, and in the course, of their pieces. I do not mean to say by this that it is necessary to imitate the mathematical regularity of the metronome ; all music so performed would become of freezing stiffness, and I even doubt whether it would be possible to observe so flat a uniformity during a certain number of bars. But the metronome is none the less excellent to consult in order to know the original time, and its chief alterations.

If the conductor possess neither the author's instructions, tradition, nor metronome indications, — which frequently happens in the ancient masterpieces, written at a period when the metronome was not invented, — he has no other guide than the vague terms employed to designate the time to be taken, and his own instinct, his feeling — more or less distinguishing, more or less just — of the author's style. We are compelled to admit that these guides are too often insufficient and delusive. Of this we have proof in seeing how old operas are given in towns where the traditional mode of performance no longer exists. In ten different kinds of time, there will always be at least four taken wrongly. I once heard a chorus of *Iphigenia in Tauride* performed in a German theatre *allegro assai, two in the bar*, instead of *allegro non troppo, four in the bar;* that is to say, exactly twice too fast. Examples might be multiplied of such disasters, occasioned either by the ignorance or the carelessness of conductors of orchestras ; or else by the real difficulty which exists for even the best-gifted and most careful men to discover the precise meaning of the Italian terms used as indications of the time to be taken. Of course, no one can be at a loss to distinguish a Largo from a Presto. If the Presto be two in a bar, a tolerably sagacious conductor, from inspection of the passages and melodic designs contained in the piece, will be able to discern the degree of quickness intended by the author. But if the Largo be four in a bar, of simple melodic structure, and containing but few notes in each bar, what means has the hapless conductor of discovering the true time ? And in how many ways might he not be deceived ? The different degrees of slowness that might be assigned to the performance of such a Largo are very numerous ; the individual feeling of the orchestral conductor must then become the sole authority ; and, after all, it is the author's feeling, not his, which is in question. Composers therefore ought not to neglect placing metronome indications in their works ; and orchestral conductors are bound to study them closely. The neglect of this study on the part of the latter, is an act of dishonesty.

I will now suppose the conductor to be perfectly well acquainted with the times of the different movements in the work of which he is about to conduct the performance or rehearsals ; he wishes to impart to the musicians acting under his orders the rhythmical feeling within him, to decide the duration of each bar, and to cause the uniform observance of this duration by all the performers. Now this precision and this uniformity can only be established in the more or less numerous assemblage of band and chorus by means of certain signs made by their conductor.

These signs indicate the principle divisions, the accents of the bar, and, in many cases, the subdivisions, and the half-accents. I need hardly here explain what is meant by the "accents" (accented and unaccented parts of a bar) ; I am presupposing that I address musicians.

The orchestral conductor generally uses a small light stick, of about a foot in length, and rather whitish than of a dark color (it is seen better), which he holds in his right hand, to make clearly distinct his mode of marking the commencement, the interior division, and the close of each bar. The bow, employed by some violinist-conductors (leaders), is less suitable than the stick. It is somewhat flexible, and this want of rigidity, together with the slight resistance it offers to the air, on account of its appendage of hair, renders its indications less precise.

The simplest of all times — two in a bar — is beaten simply.

The arm and the stick of the conductor are raised, so that his hand is on a level with his head, he marks the first beat, by dropping the point of his stick perpendicularly (*bending his wrist* as much as possible; and not lowering the whole arm), and the second beat by raising the stick by a contrary gesture.



The time — one in a bar — being in reality, and particularly for the conductor, but the time of an extremely rapid two in a bar, should be beaten like the preceding. As the conductor is obliged to raise the point of his stick, after having lowered it, he necessarily divides this into two portions.

In the time — four in a bar — the first gesture, or down beat, is universally adopted for marking the first accented part, the commencement of the bar.

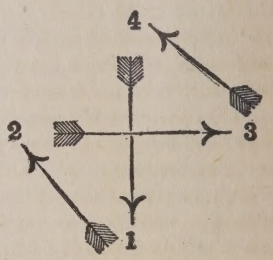


The second movement made by the conducting-stick, from right to left, rising, indicates the second beat (first unaccented part). A third, transversely, from left to right, indicates the third beat (second accented part); and a fourth, obliquely, from down to up, indicates the fourth beat (second unaccented part). The combination of these four gestures may be figured thus: —





It is of importance that the conductor, in thus delivering his different directions, should not move his arm much; and consequently, not allow his stick to pass over much space; for each of these gestures should operate nearly instantaneously; or at least, take but so slight a movement as to be imperceptible. If the movement becomes perceptible, on the contrary, and multiplied by the number of times that the gesture is repeated, it ends by throwing the conductor behind in the time he is beating, and by giving to his conducting a tardiness that proves injurious. This defect, moreover, has the result of needlessly fatiguing the conductor, and of producing exaggerated evolutions, verging on the ridiculous, which attract the spectators' attention, and become very disagreeable to witness.



In the time, three in a bar, the first gesture made, from up to down, is likewise universally adopted for marking the first beat; but there are two ways of marking the second. The majority of orchestral conductors indicate it by a gesture from left to right; thus: —



Some German Kapel-meisters do the contrary; and carry the stick from right to left; thus: —

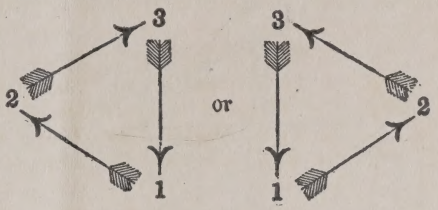


This way has the disadvantage — when the conductor turns his back to the orchestra, as in theatres — of permitting only a small number of musicians to perceive the very important indication of the second beat; the body of the conductor then hiding the movement of his arm. The other method of proceeding is preferable; since the conductor stretches his arm *outwards*, withdrawing it from his

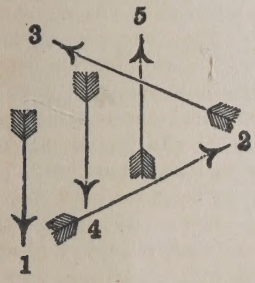
chest; and his stick, which he takes care to raise slightly above the level of his shoulder, remains perfectly visible to all eyes. When the conductor faces the players, it is immaterial whether he marks the second beat to the right, or to the left.

However, the third beat of the time, three in a bar, is always marked like the last of the time, four in a bar; by an oblique movement upwards.

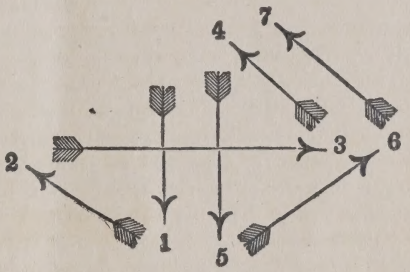
The times, — five and seven in a bar, — would be more comprehensible for the performers, if instead of indicating them by a particular series of gestures, they were treated as though the one was composed of three and two in a bar, and the other composed of four and three.



Then, these times would be beaten thus: —



Example of seven in a bar: —



These different times, in order to be divided in this way, are assumed to belong to movements of moderate measure. The advice would not hold good if their measure were either very quick or very slow.

The time, two in a bar, I have already signified, cannot be beaten otherwise than as we have before seen—whatever its degree of rapidity. But if, as an exception, it should be very slow, the conductor ought to subdivide it.

A very rapid four in a bar, on the contrary, should be beaten two in a bar; the four accustomed gestures of a moderate movement becoming then so hurried as to present nothing decided to the eye, and serving only to confuse the performer instead of giving him confidence. Moreover, — and this is of much more consequence, — the conductor, by uselessly making these four gestures in a quick movement, renders the pace of the rhythm awkward, and loses the freedom of gesture which a simple division of the time into its half would leave him.

Generally speaking, composers are wrong to write in such a case the indication of the time as four in a bar. When the movement is very brisk, they should never write any other than the sign 𝔠, and not that of 𝔆, which might lead the conductor into error.



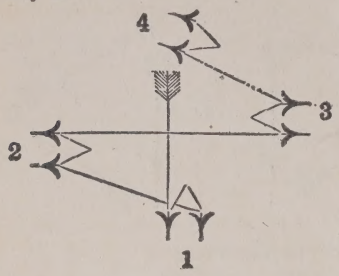
It is exactly the same for the time, three in a bar, fast $\frac{3}{4}$ or $\frac{3}{8}$. Then the conductor must omit the gesture of the second beat, and, by remaining the period of a beat longer on the first, only raise the stick at the third.

It would be absurd to attempt to beat the three in a bar of one of Beethoven's scherzos.

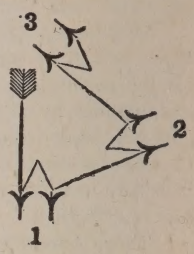
In slow movements the rule for these two times is like that for two in a bar. If the movement is very slow, each time must be divided;

and consequently eight gestures must be made for the time, four in a bar, and six for the time, three in a bar, repeating (and shortening) each of the principal gestures we have before instanced.

Example of four in a bar, very slow :



Example of three in a bar, very slow :



The arm should take no part in the little supplementary gesture indicating the subdivision of the bar ; merely the wrist causing the stick to move.

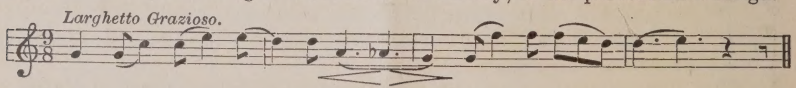
This division of the different times is intended to prevent the rhythmical divergences which might easily take place among the performers during the interval which separates one beat from the other. The conductor not indicating anything during this period (rendered somewhat considerable by the extreme slowness of the movement), the players are then entirely left to themselves, *without conductor ;* and as the rhythmical feeling is not the same with all, it follows that some hurry, while others slacken, and unity is soon destroyed. The only exception possible to this rule is that of a first-rate orchestra, composed of performers who are well acquainted with each other, are accustomed to play together, and know almost by heart the work they are executing. Even then, the inattention of a single player may occasion an accident. Why incur its possibility ? I know that certain artists feel their self-love hurt when thus kept in leading-strings (like children, they say) ; but with a conductor who has no other view than the excellence of the ultimate result, this consideration can have no weight. Even in a quartet, it is seldom that the individual feeling of the players can be left entirely free to follow its own dictates. In a symphony, that of the conductor must rule. The art of comprehending it, and fulfilling it with unanimity, constitutes the perfection of execution ; and individual wills — which can never agree one with another — should never be permitted to manifest themselves.

This being fully understood, it will be seen that subdivision is still more essential for very slow times ; as those of $\frac{6}{4}$, $\frac{6}{8}$, $\frac{9}{8}$, $\frac{12}{8}$ etc.

But these times — where the triple rhythm plays so important a part — may be divided in various ways.

If the movement is brisk or moderate, it is rarely well to indicate other than the simple beats of these times, according to the procedure adopted for the analogous simple times.

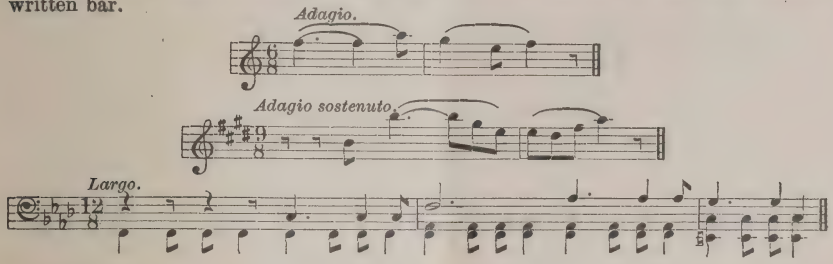
The times of $\frac{6}{8}$ allegretto, and of $\frac{6}{4}$ allegro, therefore, are to be beaten like those of two in a bar : — $\frac{2}{2}$ = or 2 = or $\frac{2}{4}$; the time, $\frac{9}{8}$ allegro, should be beaten like that of three in a bar — $\frac{3}{4}$ moderato, or like that of $\frac{3}{8}$ andantino ; and the time, $\frac{12}{8}$ moderato or allegro, like the time, simple four in a bar. But if the movement be adagio, largo assai, or andante maestoso, either all the quavers, or a crotchet followed by a quaver, should be beaten, according to the form of the melody, or the predominant design.



It is unnecessary, in this three in a bar, to mark all the quavers ; the rhythm of a crotchet followed by a quaver in each beat suffices.

As to the subdivision, the little supplementary gesture for simple times should be made; this subdivision will however separate each beat into two unequal portions, since it is requisite to indicate visibly the value of the crotchet, and that of the quaver.

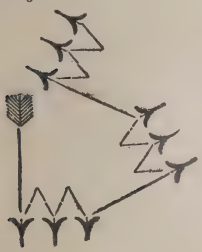
If the movement is still slower, there can be no hesitation; the only way to ensure unity of execution is to beat all the quavers, whatever be the nature of the written bar.



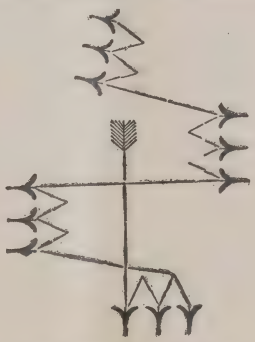
Taking the three measures shown above in order, the conductor must beat three quavers down, and three up, for the time of $\frac{6}{8}$:—



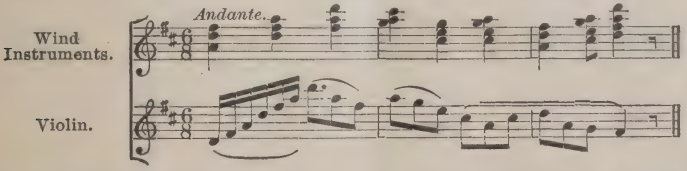
Three down, three to the right, and three up, for the time of $\frac{9}{8}$:—



Three down, three to the left, three to the right, and three up, for the time of $\frac{12}{8}$:—



A dilemma sometimes presents itself when certain parts—for the sake of contrast—are given a triple rhythm, while others preserve the dual rhythm.



If the wind-instrument parts in the above example are confided to players who are good musicians, there will be no need to change the manner of marking the bar, and the conductor may continue to subdivide it by six, or to divide it simply by two. The majority of players, however, seeming to hesitate at the moment when, by employing the syncopated form, the triple rhythm clashes with the dual rhythm, require assur-

ance, which can be given by easy means. The uncertainty occasioned them by the sudden appearance of the unexcepted rhythm, contradicted by the rest of the orchestra, always leads the performers to cast an instinctive glance towards the conductor, as if seeking his assistance. He should look at them, turning somewhat towards them, and marking the triple rhythm by very slight gestures, as if the time were really three in a bar, but in such a way that the violins and other instruments playing in dual rhythm may not observe the change, which would quite put them out. From this compromise it results that the new rhythm of three-time, being marked furtively by the conductor, is executed with steadiness ; while the two-time rhythm, already firmly established, continues without difficulty, although no longer indicated by the conductor. On the other hand, nothing, in my opinion can be more blamable, or more contrary to musical good sense, than the application of this procedure to passages where two rhythms of opposite nature do not co-exist, and where merely syncopations are introduced. The conductor, dividing the bar by *the number of accents he finds contained in it*, then destroys (for all the auditors who see him) the effect of syncopation ; and substitutes a mere change of time for a play of rhythm of the most bewitching interest. If the accents are marked, instead of the beats, in the following passage from Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony, we have the subjoined : —



whereas the four previously maintained display the syncopation and make it better felt : —



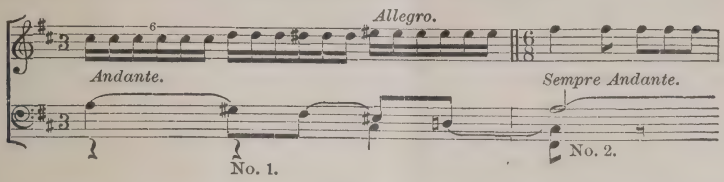
This voluntary submission to a rhythmical form *which the author intended to thwart* is one of the gravest faults in style that a beater of the time can commit.

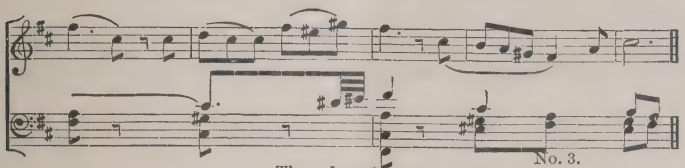
There is another dilemma, extremely troublesome for a conductor, and demanding all his presence of mind. It is that presented by the super-addition of different bars. It is easy to conduct a bar in dual time placed above or beneath another bar in triple time, if both have the same kind of movement. Their chief divisions are then equal in duration, and one needs only to divide them in half, marking the two principal beats : —



But if, in the middle of a piece slow in movement, there is introduced a new form brisk in movement, and if the composer (either for the sake of facilitating the execution of the quick movement, or because it was impossible to write otherwise) has

adopted for this new movement the short bar which corresponds with it, there may then occur two, or even three short bars super-added to a slow bar : —



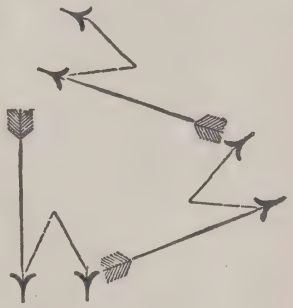


Three bars to one.

The conductor's task is to guide and keep together these different bars of unequal number and dissimilar movement. He attains this by dividing the beats in the andante bar, No. 1, which precedes the entrance of the allegro in $\frac{6}{8}$, and by continuing to divide them; but taking care to mark the division more decidedly. The players of the allegro in $\frac{6}{8}$ then comprehend that the two gestures of the conductor represent the two beats of their short bar, while the players of the andante take these same gestures merely for a divided beat of their long bar.

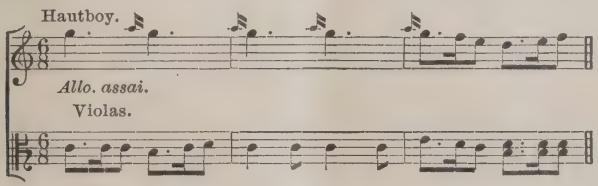


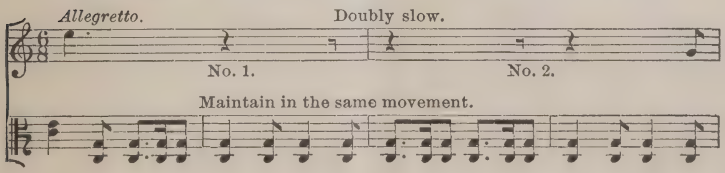
Bar No. 1.

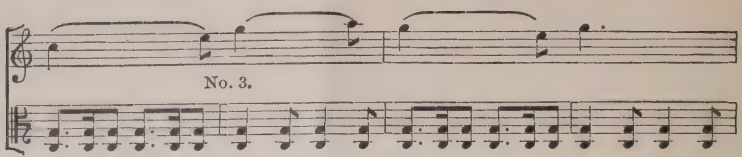


Bars Nos. 2, 3, and so on.

It will be seen that this is really quite simple, because the division of the short bar, and the subdivisions of the long one, mutually correspond. The following example, where a slow bar is super-added to the short ones, without this correspondence existing, is more awkward : —









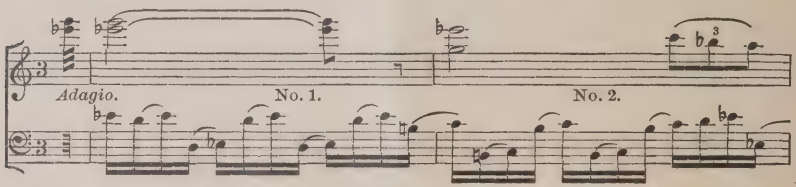
Here, the three bars allegro-assai preceding the allegretto are beaten in simple two time, as usual. At the moment when the allegretto begins, the bar of which is double that of the preceding, and of the one maintained by the violas, the conductor marks *two divided beats* for the long bar, by two equal gestures down, and two others up : —



The two large gestures divide the long bar in half, and explain its value to the hautboys, without perplexing the violas, who maintain the brisk movement, on account of the little gesture which also divides in half their short bar.

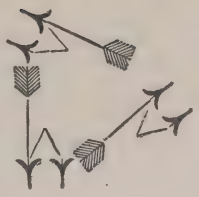
From bar No. 3, the conductor ceases to divide thus the long bar by 4, on account of the triple rhythm of the melody in $\frac{6}{8}$, which this gesture interferes with. He then confines himself to marking the two beats of the long bar ; while the violas, already launched in their rapid rhythm, continue it without difficulty, comprehending exactly that each stroke of the conductor's stick marks merely *the commencement* of their short bar.

This last observation shows with what care dividing the beats of a bar should be avoided when a portion of the instruments or voices has to execute triplets upon these beats. The division, by cutting in half the second note of the triplet, renders its execution uncertain. It is even necessary to abstain from this division of the beats of a bar just before the moment when the rhythmical or melodic design is divided by three, in order not to give to the players the impression of a rhythm contrary to that which they are about to hear : —





In this example, the subdivision of the bar into six, or the division of beats into two, is useful; and offers no inconvenience *during bar No. 1*, when the following gesture is made: —



But from the beginning of bar No. 2 it is necessary to make only the simple gestures: —



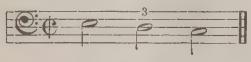
on account of the triplet on the third beat, and on account of the one following it which the double gesture would much interfere with.

In the famous ball-scene of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, the difficulty of keeping together the three orchestras, written in three different measures, is less than might be thought. It is sufficient to mark downwards each beat of the *tempo di minuetto*: —

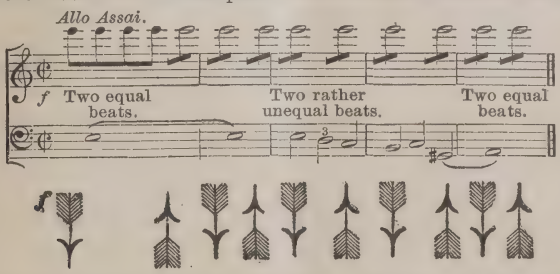


Once entered upon the combination, the little allegro in $\frac{3}{8}$, of which a whole bar represents one-third, or one beat of that of the minuetto, and the other allegro in $\frac{2}{4}$, of which a whole bar represents two-thirds, or two beats, correspond with each other and with the principal theme; while the whole proceeds without the slightest confusion. All that is requisite is to make them come in properly.

A gross fault that I have seen committed, consists in enlarging the time of a piece in common-time, when the author has introduced into it triplets of minims: —

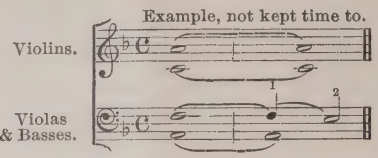


In such a case, the third minim adds nothing to the duration of the bar, as some conductors seem to imagine. They may, if they please, and if the movement be slow or moderate, make these passages by beating the bar with three beats, but the duration of the whole bar should remain precisely the same. In a case where these triplets occur in a very quick bar in common-time (allegro-assai), the three gestures then cause confusion, and it is absolutely necessary to make only two, — one beat upon the first minim, and one upon the third. These gestures, owing to the quickness of the movement, differ little to the eye, from the two of the bar with two equal beats, and do not affect the movement of those parts of the orchestra which contain no triplets.



We will now speak of the conductor's method of beating in recitatives. Here, as the singer or the instrumentalist is reciting, and no longer subject to the regular division

of the bar, it is requisite, while following him attentively, to make the orchestra strike, simultaneously and with precision, the chords or instrumental passages with which the recitative is intermingled ; and to make the harmony change at the proper instant, when the recitative is accompanied either by holding-notes or by a tremolo in several parts, of which the least apparent, occasionally, is that which the conductor must most regard, since upon its motion depends the change of chord : —



In this example, the conductor, while following the reciting part, not kept time to, has especially to attend to the viola part, and to make it move, at the proper moment, from the F to the E, at the commencement of the second bar ; because otherwise, as this part is executed by several instrumentalists playing in unison, some of them would hold the F longer than the rest, and a transient discord would be produced.

Many conductors have the habit, when directing the orchestra in recitatives, of paying no heed to the written division of the bar, and of marking an up beat before that whereon a brief orchestral chord occurs, even when this chord comes on an unaccented part of the bar : —



In a passage such as this, they raise the arm at the rest which commences the bar, and lower it at the time of the chord.

I cannot approve of such a method, which nothing justifies, and which may frequently occasion accidents in the execution. Neither do I see why, in recitatives, the bar should not be divided regularly, and the real beats marked in their place, as in music beaten in time. I therefore advise — for the preceding example — that the first beat should be made down, as usual, and the stick carried to the left for striking the chord upon the second beat ; and so on for analogous cases ; always dividing the bar regularly. It is very important, moreover, to divide it according to the time previously indicated by the author, and not to forget, — if this time is *allegro* or *maestoso*, and if the reciting part has been some time reciting unaccompanied, — to give to all the beats, when the orchestra comes in again, the value of those of an allegro or of a maestoso. For when the orchestra plays alone, it does so generally in time ; it plays without measured time only when it accompanies a voice or instrument in recitative.

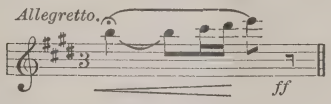
In the exceptional case where the recitative is written for the orchestra itself, or for the chorus, or for a portion of either orchestra or chorus, it being then requisite to keep together, whether in unison or in harmony, but without regular time, a certain number of performers, *the conductor himself becomes the real reciter*, and gives to each beat of the bar the duration he judges fit. According to the form of the phrase, he divides and subdivides the beats, now marks the accents, now the semiquavers, if there are any, and, in short, indicates with his stick the melodic form of the recitative.

It must of course be understood that the performers, knowing their parts almost

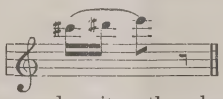
by heart, keep their eye constantly upon him, otherwise, neither security nor unity can be obtained.

In general, even for timed music, the conductor should require the players he directs to look towards him as often as possible.

An orchestra which does not watch the conducting-stick has no conductor. Often, after a pedal-point for instance, the conductor is obliged to refrain from marking the decisive gesture which is to determine the coming in of the orchestra until he sees the eyes of all the performers fixed upon him. It is the duty of the conductor, during rehearsal, to accustom them to look towards him simultaneously at the important moment.



If the rule just indicated were not observed in the above bar, of which the first beat, marking a pedal-point, may be prolonged indefinitely, the passage —



could not be uttered with firmness and unity ; the players, not watching the conductor's stick, could not know when he decides the second beat and resumes the movement suspended by the pedal-point.

The obligation upon the performers to look at their conductor necessarily implies an equal obligation on his part to let himself be well seen by them. He should, — whatever may be the disposal of the orchestra, whether on rows of steps, or on a horizontal plane, — place himself so as to form the centre of all surrounding eyes.

To place himself well in sight, a conductor requires an especial platform, elevated in proportion as the number of performers is large and occupies much space. His desk should not be so high that the portion sustaining the score shall hide his face for the expression of his countenance has much to do with the influence he exercises If there is no conductor for an orchestra that does not and will not watch him, neither is there any if he cannot be well seen.

As to the employment of noises of any kind whatever, produced by the stick of the conductor upon his desk, or by his foot upon the platform, they call for no other than unreserved reprehension. It is worse than a bad method ; it is a barbarism. In a theatre, however, when the stage evolutions prevent the chorus-singers from seeing the conducting-stick, the conductor is compelled — to ensure, after a pause, the taking up a point by the chorus — to indicate this point by marking the beat which precedes it by a slight tap of his stick upon the desk. This exceptional circumstance is the only one which can warrant the employment of an *indicating noise*, and even then it is to be regretted that recourse must be had to it.

While speaking of chorus-singers, and of their operations in theatres, it may here be observed that chorus-masters often allow themselves to beat time at the side-scenes, without seeing the conductor's stick, frequently even without hearing the orchestra. The result is that this time, beaten more or less ill, and not corresponding with that of the conductor, inevitably induces a rhythmical discordance between the choral and instrumental bodies, and subverts all unity instead of tending to maintain it.

There is another traditional barbarism which lies within the province of an intelligent and active conductor to abolish. If a choral or instrumental piece is performed behind the scenes, without accompaniment from the principal orchestra, another con-

ductor is absolutely essential. If the orchestra accompany this portion, the first conductor, who hears the distant music, is then strictly bound to *let himself be guided* by the second, and to follow his time *by ear*. But if — as frequently happens in modern music — the sound of the chief orchestra hinders the conductor from hearing that which is being performed at a distance from him, the intervention of a special conducting mechanism becomes indispensable, in order to establish instantaneous communication between him and the distant performers. Many attempts, more or less ingenious, have been made of this kind, the result of which has not everywhere answered expectations. That of Covent Garden Theatre, in London, moved by the conductor's foot, acts tolerably well. But the *electric metronome*, set up by Mr. Van Bruge in the Brussels Theatre, leaves nothing to be desired. It consists of an apparatus of copper ribbons, leading from a Voltaic battery placed beneath the stage, attached to the conductor's desk, and terminating in a movable stick fastened at one end on a pivot before a board at a certain distance from the orchestral conductor. To this latter's desk is affixed a key of copper, something like the ivory key of a pianoforte ; it is elastic, and provided on the interior side with a protuberance of about a quarter of an inch long. Immediately beneath this protuberance is a little cup, also of copper, filled with quicksilver. At the instant when the orchestral conductor, desiring to mark any particular beat of a bar, presses the copper key with the forefinger of his left hand (his right being occupied in holding, as usual, the conducting-stick) this key is lowered, the protuberance passes into the cup filled with quicksilver, a slight electric spark is emitted, and the stick placed at the other extremity of the copper ribbon makes an oscillation before its board. The communication of the fluid and the movement are quite simultaneous, no matter how great a distance is traversed.

The performers being grouped behind the scenes, their eyes fixed upon the stick of the electric metronome, are thus directly subject to the conductor, who could, were it needful, conduct, from the middle of the Opera orchestra in Paris, a piece of music performed at Versailles.

It is merely requisite to agree upon beforehand with the chorus-singers, or with their conductor (if as an additional precaution, they have one), the way in which the orchestral conductor beats the time — whether he marks all the principal beats, or only the first of the bar — since the oscillations of the stick, moved by electricity, being always from right to left, indicate nothing precise in this respect.

When I first used, at Brussels, the valuable instrument I have just endeavored to describe, its action presented one objection. Each time that the copper key of my desk underwent the pressure of my left forefinger, it struck, underneath, another plate of copper, and, notwithstanding the delicacy of the contact, produced a little sharp noise, which, during the pauses of the orchestra, attracted the attention of the audience, to the detriment of the musical effect.

I pointed out the fault to Mr. Van Bruge, who substituted for the lower plate of copper the little cup filled with quicksilver, previously mentioned. Into this the protuberance so entered as to establish the electric current without causing the slightest noise.

Nothing remains now, as regards the use of this mechanism, but the crackling of the spark at the moment of its emission. This, however, is too slight to be heard by the public.

The metronome is not expensive to put up ; it costs £16 at the most. Large lyric theatres, churches, and concert-rooms should long ago have been provided with one. Yet, save at the Brussels Theatre, it is nowhere to be found. This would appear incredible, were it not that the carelessness of the majority of directors of institutions

where music forms a feature is well known; as are their instinctive aversion to whatever disturbs old-established customs, their indifference to the interests of art, their parsimony wherever an outlay for music is needed, and the utter ignorance of the principles of our art among those in whose hands rests the ordering of its destiny.

I have not yet said all on the subject of those dangerous auxiliaries named chorus-masters. Very few of them are sufficiently versed in the art, to conduct a musical performance, so that the orchestral conductor can depend upon them. He cannot therefore watch them too closely when compelled to submit to their coadjutorship.

The most to be dreaded are those whom age has deprived of activity and energy. The maintenance of vivacious times is an impossibility to them. Whatever may be the degree of quickness indicated at the head of a piece confided to their conducting, little by little they slacken its pace, until the rhythm is reduced to a certain medium slowness, that seems to harmonize with the speed at which their blood flows, and the general feebleness of their organization.

It must in truth be added, that old men are not the only ones with whom composers run this risk. There are men in the prime of life, of a lymphatic temperament, whose blood seems to circulate *moderato*. If they have to conduct an allegro assai, they gradually slacken it to *moderato;* if, on the contrary, it is a largo or an andante sostenuto, provided the piece is prolonged, they will, by dint of progressive animation, attain a *moderato* long before the end. The *moderato* is their natural pace, and they recur to it as infallibly as would a pendulum after having been a moment hurried or slackened in its oscillations.

These people are the born enemies of all characteristic music, and the greatest destroyers of style. May Fate preserve the orchestral conductor from their co-operation.

Once, in a large town (which I will not name), there was to be performed behind the scenes a very simple chorus, written in $\frac{6}{8}$, allegretto. The aid of the chorus-master became necessary. He was an old man.

The time in which this chorus was to be taken having been first agreed upon by the orchestra, our Nestor followed it pretty decently during the first few bars; but, soon after, the slackening became such that there was no continuing without rendering the piece perfectly ridiculous. It was recommenced twice, thrice, four times; a full half-hour was occupied in ever-increasingly vexatious efforts, but always with the same result. The preservation of allegretto time was absolutely impossible to the worthy man. At last the orchestral conductor, out of all patience, came and begged him not to conduct at all; he had hit upon an expedient: — He caused the chorus-singers to simulate a march-movement, raising each foot alternately, without moving on. This movement, being in exactly the same time as the dual rhythm of the $\frac{6}{8}$ in a bar, allegretto, the chorus-singers, who were no longer hindered by their director, at once performed the piece as though they had sung marching; with no less unity than regularity, and without slackening the time.

I acknowledge, however, that many chorus-masters, or sub-conductors of orchestras, are sometimes of real utility, and even indispensable for the maintenance of unity among very large masses of performers. When these masses are obliged to be so disposed as that one portion of the players or chorus-singers turn their back on the conductor, he needs a certain number of sub-beaters of the time, placed before those of the performers who cannot see him, and charged with repeating all his signals. In order that this repetition shall be precise, the sub-conductors must be careful never to take their eyes off the chief conductor's stick for a single instant.

If, in order to look at their score, they cease to watch him for only three bars, a discrepancy arises immediately between their time and his, and all is lost.

In a festival where 1200 performers were assembled under my direction, at Paris, I had to employ four chorus-masters, stationed at the four corners of the vocal mass, and two sub-conductors, one of whom directed the wind-instruments, and the other the instruments of percussion. I had earnestly besought them to look towards me incessantly; they did not omit to do so, and our eight sticks, rising and falling without the slightest discrepancy of rhythm, established amidst our 1200 performers the most perfect unity ever witnessed.

With one or more electric metronomes, it seems no longer necessary to have recourse to this means. One might, in fact, thus easily conduct chorus-singers who turn their back towards the chief conductor; but attentive and intelligent sub-conductors are always preferable to a machine. They have not only to beat the time, like the metronomic staff, but they have also to speak to the groups around them, to call their attention to nice shades of execution, and, after bar-rests, to remind them when the moment of their re-entry comes.

In a space arranged as a semicircular amphitheatre, the orchestral conduct may conduct a considerable number of performers alone, all eyes then being able to look towards him. Neverthless, the employment of a certain number of sub-conductors appears to me preferable to individual direction, on account of the great distance between the chief conductor and the extreme points of the vocal and instrumental body.

The more distant the orchestral conductor is from the performers he directs, the more his influence over them is diminished.

The best way would be to have several sub-conductors, with several electric metronomes beating before their eyes the principal beats of the bar.

And now, — should the orchestral conductor give the time standing or sitting down?

If, in theatres where they perform scores of immense length, it is very difficult to endure the fatigue of remaining on foot the whole evening, it is none the less true that the orchestral conductor, when seated, loses a portion of his power, and cannot give free course to his animation, if he possess any.

Then, should he conduct reading from a full score, or from a first violin part (leader's copy), as is customary in some theatres? It is evident that he should have before him a full score. Conducting by means of a part containing only the principal instrumental cues, the bass and the melody, demands a needless effort of memory from a conductor; and moreover, if he happens to tell one of the performers, whose part he cannot examine, that he is wrong, exposes him to the chance of the reply: "How do you know?"

The disposal and grouping of the players and chorus-singers come also within the province of the orchestral conductor; particularly for concerts. It is impossible to indicate arbitrarily the best method of grouping the performers in a theatre or concert-room; the shape and arrangement of the interior of these places necessarily influence the course to be taken in such a case. Let us add, that it depends, moreover, upon the number of performers requiring to be grouped; and, on some occasions, upon the style of composition adopted by the author whose work is to be performed.

In general, for concerts, the following disposal of the orchestra seems best: — An amphitheatre of eight, or at least, five rows is indispensable. The semicircular form is the best for the amphitheatre. If it is large enough to contain the whole

orchestra, the entire mass of instrumentalists can be disposed of along these rows, the first violins in front on the right, facing the public; the second violins in front on the left; the violas, in the middle, between the two groups of violins; the flutes hautboys, clarinets, horns, and bassoons behind the first violins; a double rank of violoncellos and double-basses behind the second violins; the trumpets, cornets, trombones, and tubas behind the violas; the rest of the violoncellos and double-basses behind the wooden wind instruments; the harps in the foreground, close to the orchestral conductor; the kettle-drums, and other instruments of percussion behind or in the centre of the brass instruments; the orchestral conductor, turning his back to the public, at the base of the orchestra, and near to the foremost desks of the first and second violins.

There should be a horizontal flooring, or stage, more or less wide, extending in front of the first rows of the amphitheatre. On this flooring the chorus-singers should be placed, in form of a fan turned three-quarters towards the public, so that all shall be able easily to see the motions of the orchestral conductor. The grouping of the chorus-singers, in consonance with their respective order of voice, will differ according as the author has written in three, four, or six parts. At any rate, the women — sopranos and contraltos — should be in front, seated; the tenors standing behind the contraltos; and the basses standing behind the sopranos.

The solo-singers should occupy the centre, and foremost, part of the front stage, and should always place themselves in such a way as to be able, by slightly turning the head, to see the conducting-stick.

For the rest, I repeat, these indications can be but approximate; they may be, for many reasons, modified in various ways.

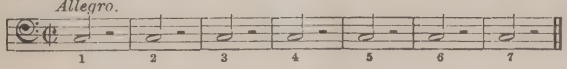
At the Conservatoire, in Paris, where the amphitheatre is composed of only four or five rows, not circular, and cannot therefore contain the whole orchestra, the violins and violas are on the stage; while the basses and wind instruments alone occupy the rows; the chorus is seated on the front of the stage, facing the public, and the women, sopranos and contraltos, turning their backs directly upon the orchestral conductor, are utterly unable to see his motions. The arrangement is very inconvenient for this portion of the chorus.

It is of the greatest consequence that the chorus-singers placed on the front of the stage shall occupy a plane somewhat lower than that of the violins; otherwise they would considerably deaden the sound of these instruments.

For the same reason, if there are no other rows for the choir in front of the orchestra, it is absolutely needful that the women should be seated, and the men remain standing up; in order that the voices of the tenors and basses, proceeding from a more elevated point than those of the sopranos and contraltos, may come forth freely, and be neither stifled nor intercepted.

When the presence of the chorus-singers in front of the orchestra is not necessary, the conductor must take care to send them away; since this large number of human bodies injures the sonority of the instruments. A symphony performed by an orchestra thus more or less stifled, loses much of its effect.

There are yet other precautions, relative especially to the orchestra, which the conductor may also take, to avoid certain defects in performance. The instruments of percussion, placed, as I have indicated, upon one of the last rows of the orchestra, have a tendency to modify the rhythm, and slacken the time. A series of strokes on the drum struck at regular intervals in a quick movement, like the following: —



will sometimes lead to the complete destruction of a fine rhythmical progression, by checking the onward bound of the rest of the orchestra, and destroying the unity. Almost always, the drum player, through not observing the original time given by the conductor, is somewhat behindhand in striking his first stroke. This retardment, multiplied by the number of strokes which follow the first one, soon produces — as may be imagined — a rhythmical discrepancy of the most fatal effect. The conductor, — all whose efforts to re-establish unanimity are then in vain — has only one thing left to do; which is, to insist that the long drum player shall count beforehand the number of strokes to be given in the passage in question, and that, knowing his part, he shall no longer look at his copy, but keep his eyes constantly fixed upon the conducting-stick; by which means he will follow the time without the slightest want of precision.

Another retardment, arising from a different cause, frequently takes place in the trumpet-parts; it is when they contain a quick flow of passages such as this: —



The trumpet-player, instead of taking breath *before* the first of these three bars, takes breath at their commencement, during the quaver-rest, A; and, not counting for anything the short time it has taken him to breathe, gives its whole value to the quaver-rest, which thus becomes superadded to the value of the first bar. The result of this is the following: —



an effect all the worse because the final accent, struck at the commencement of the third bar by the rest of the orchestra, comes a third of the time too slow in the trumpets, and destroys unity in the striking of the last chord.

To obviate this, the conductor must first previously warn the players against such inexactness, into which they almost all are led to fall unawares; and then, while conducting, must cast a glance towards them at the decisive moment, and *anticipate a little*, by beating the first beat of the bar where they come in. It is incredible how difficult it is to prevent trumpet-players from doubling the value of a quaver-rest thus placed.

When a long *accelerando*, *little by little*, is indicated by the composer, for passing from an allegro moderato to a presto, the majority of orchestral conductors hurry the time *by jerks*, instead of quickening it equally throughout, by an insensible onward rate. This should be carefully avoided.

The same remark applies to the converse proposition. It is even more difficult to slacken a quick time smoothly, and without checks, so as to transform it little by little into a slow time. Often, from a desire to testify zeal, or from defect of delivery in his musical feeling, a conductor demands from his players *an exaggeration of nice gradations*. He comprehends neither the character nor the style of the piece. The gradations then become so many blemishes; the accents, yells; the intentions of the poor composer are totally disfigured and perverted; while those of the orchestral conductor — however politely meant they may be — are none the less injurious: like the caresses of the ass in the fable, who crushed his master while fondling him.

And now let us instance many deplorable abuses that are obtained in almost all

the orchestras of Europe — abuses which reduce composers to despair, and which it is the duty of conductors to abolish as soon as possible.

Performers playing stringed instruments will rarely give themselves the trouble to play a *tremolo;* they substitute for this very characteristic effect, a tame repetition of the note, half, and sometimes three-quarters slower than the one whence results the tremolo: instead of demisemiquavers, they make triple or double ones; and in lieu of producing sixty-four notes in a bar in four-time (adagio), they produce only thirty-two, or even sixteen. The action of the arm necessary for producing a true tremolo, demands from them too great an effort. This idleness is intolerable.

Many double-bass players permit themselves — from idleness, also, or from a dread of being unable to achieve certain difficulties — to simplify their part. This race of simplifiers has existed for forty years; but it cannot endure any longer. In ancient works, the double-bass parts were extremely simple; therefore there can be no reason to impoverish them still more: those in modern scores are rather more difficult, it is true; but, with very few exceptions, there is nothing in them impossible of execution; composers, masters of their art, write them with care, and as they ought to be executed. If it is from idleness that the simplifiers pervert them, the energetic orchestral conductor is armed with the necessary authority to compel the fulfilment of their duty. If it is from incapacity, let him dismiss them. It is his best interest to rid himself of instrumentalists who cannot play their instrument.

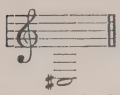
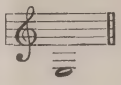
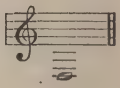
Flute-players, accustomed to having their parts written in the upper octave, and not admitting that their part can be written below that of clarinets or hautboys, frequently transpose entire passages an octave higher. The conductor, if he does not carefully peruse his score, if he is not thoroughly acquainted with the work he is conducting, or if his ear lacks keenness, will not perceive the strange liberty thus taken. Nevertheless, multitudes of such instances occur, and care should be taken to banish them entirely.

It happens everywhere (I do not say in some orchestras only) — that when ten, fifteen, or twenty violinists have to play the same part in unison, that they do not count the bars' rest; each, from idleness, relying on the others doing it. Whence it follows that scarcely half of them come in again at the right moment; while the rest still hold their instrument under their left arm, and look about them. Thus the point is greatly weakened, if not entirely missed. I invoke the attention and vigor of orchestral conductors to this insufferable habit. It is, however, so rooted that they will only ensure its extirpation by making a large number of violinists amenable for the fault of a single player; by inflicting a fine, for example, upon a whole row, if one of them misses coming in. Even were this fine no more than half-a-crown, I will answer for it that each of the violinists would count his rests, and keep watch that his neighbors did the same, since it might be inflicted five or six times upon the same individuals in the course of one performance.

An orchestra, the instruments of which are not in tune individually, and with each other, is a monstrosity; the conductor, therfore, should take the greatest care that the musicians tune accurately. But this operation should not be performed in presence of the public; and, moreover, every instrumental noise — every kind of preluding between the acts — constitutes a real offence to all civilized auditors. The bad training of an orchestra, and its musical mediocrity is to be inferred from the impertinent noise it makes during the periods of quiet at an Opera or Concert.

It is also imperative for a conductor not to allow clarinet-players to use always the same instrument (the clarinet in *B♭*), without regard to the author's indications; just as if the different clarinets — those in *D* and *A*, particularly — had not a special

character of their own, of which the intelligent composer knows the exact value; and as if the clarinet in *A* had not moreover a low semitone more than the clarinet in *B*♭—, the C♯, of excellent effect,

 produced by the E,  which E gives only the D, 

on the clarinet in *B*♭.

A habit as vicious, and still more baneful, has crept into many orchestras since the introduction of horns with cylinders and pistons: it is that of playing *in open sounds;* by means of the new mechanism adapted to the instrument, those notes intended by the composer to be produced *in closed sounds*, by means of the right hand within the bell. Moreover, the horn-players nowadays, on account of the facility afforded by the pistons or cylinders for putting their instrument into different keys, use only the *horn in F* whatever may be the key indicated by the author. This custom gives rise to a host of inconveniences, from which the conductor should use all his efforts to preserve the works of composers *who know how to write.*

He should also set his face against the economical fashion adopted by certain theatres — called lyric — of causing the cymbals and the long drum to be played by the same performer. The sound of the cymbals when attached to the drum — as they must be to render this economy feasible — is an ignoble noise, fit only for bands at tea-gardens. This custom, moreover, leads mediocre composers into the habit of never employing one of these instruments without the other, and considering their use as solely confined to forcibly marking the accented parts of the bar. This is an idea fruitful in noisy platitudes; and one that has brought upon us the ridiculous excesses beneath which, if a stop be not put to them, dramatic music will sooner or later sink.

I conclude by expressing sincere regret at beholding choral and orchestral studies still so badly organized. Everywhere, for grand choral and instrumental compositions, the system of rehearsals in the mass is maintained. They make all the chorus-singers study at once, on the one hand; and all the instrumentalists at once, on the other. Deplorable errors, innumerable mistakes, are thus committed — particularly in the intermediate parts — errors which the chorus-master and the conductor do not perceive. Once established, these errors degenerate into habits, and become part and parcel of the execution.

The hapless chorus-singers, moreover, are by far the worst treated of all the performers during their studies, such as they are. Instead of giving them *a good conductor*, knowing the times of the different movements accurately, and proficient in the art of singing, to beat the time, and make critical observations: *a good pianist*, playing *from a well-arranged pianoforte score*, upon *a good piano;* and *a violinist*, to play in unison or in octave with the voices as each part is learned alone — instead of these three *indispensable artists*, they commit them (in two-thirds of the lyric theatres of Europe) to the superintendence of a single man, who has no more idea of the art of conducting than of that of singing, who is generally a poor musician, selected from among the worst pianists to be found, or who cannot play the pianoforte at all — some old superannuated individual, who, seated before a battered out-of-tune instrument, tries to decipher a dislocated score which he does not know, strikes false chords major, when they are minor, or vice-versa, and under the protext of conducting and of accompanying by himself, employs his right hand in setting the chorus-singers wrong in their time, and his left hand in setting them wrong in their tune.

One might believe one's self in the Dark Ages, on witnessing such an exhibition of Gothish economy.

A faithful, well-colored, clever interpretation of a modern work, even when confided to artists of a higher order, can only be obtained, I firmly believe, by partial rehearsals. Each part of a chorus should be studied singly until it is thoroughly known, before combining it with the others. The same step should be taken with regard to the orchestra, for a symphony at all complicated. The violins should first be practised alone; the violas and basses by themselves; the wooden wind instruments (with a small band of stringed instruments, to fill in the rests, and accustom the wind instruments to the points of re-entrance) and the brass instruments the same; and very often it is necessary to practise the instruments of percussion alone; and lastly, the harps, if they be numerous. The studies in combination are then far more profitable, and more rapid; and there is then good hope of attaining fidelity of interpretation, now, alas, but too rare.

The performances obtained by the old method of study are merely *approaches* to achievement; beneath which so very many masterpieces have succumbed. The superintending conductor, after the butchering of a master, none the less serenely lays down his stick with a satisfied smile; and if some few misgivings remain with him as to the mode in which he has fulfilled his task, should no one venture at the close to dispute its accomplishment, he murmurs aside: "Bah! væ victis!"

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